

Role of Media in Consumer Protection

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Abstract: *The reach of mass media extends the vast heterogeneous masses of the population of the country at the same time. With the help of mass media messages can be sent and received in any part of the world may be rural or urban. Role of media - print media as well as electronic media can be viewed as awareness of people. The media and non government organizations have an important role to play in the civil society. The media are the among the most important allies to the NGO's community some way in which the media can be important to the NGO's include writing articles / Telecast - Broadcast Programs that :*

- *Create an environment of political pressure.*
- *Convey general information, serving as a public education.*
- *Counter popular misconception.*
- *Comment on an issue providing an alternative view point.*

In this paper more emphasis is given on how media can promote awareness about NGO's activities and also how NGO's need media to convey their message to society and government and also to form public opinion about various policies and lastly media and NGO's can work for betterment of society continuously.

Keywords: *Consumer, Protection, Media, Education.*

I. Introduction

Communication is a process to achieve mutual understanding or to have an interaction or exchange of ideas, opinions, facts, information, etc among all human beings or communication is the act of transmitting information, ideas, knowledge from one person to another. Media are viewed as mass media because their reach extends the vast heterogeneous masses of the population of the country at the same time. With the help of mass media messages can be sent and received in any part of the world may be rural or urban.

Role of media- print media as well as electronic media is the awareness of people as well as society has increased enormously. Electronic media has more impact on society as compare to print media because it is visual aid of information. The press in India has always shown its solidarity with the socio economic problems of this country. There are no two opinions about the significant contribution that press, journalists, and the media people have done goodwork in bringing to light the major issues of social concern. The press in India has always been responsive in performing its duties so that those who are involved in the matters of policy making can give justice to their duties. There is no dearth example as to how the press has played a major role in unearthing certain scandals where people in the corridors of power were involved. It is not an singular matter for Indian media to take up issues, where a collective action, legislation, and policy decisions was an urgent need. Various legislations, administrative actions and even mass participations from different sections of society with divergent interest were possible only because of initiative and lead taken by media people. May it be a problem of national integration, social unity, and economic injustice, upliftment of down-trodden or educational and economic advancement?

Earlier the readership was the only criteria to assess the affectivity of media, as it was only print media that was its mark. The development of movies brought a big change. People now could see and listen what the communicator wanted to say? Literacy was no more a criteria to establish a link with audience and viewers. Multiplicities of communication media have brought a sea change in the psychology of people. People became more awakened, well-informed and cautious. They could know different views of the same problem; they could perceive, understand and analyze a situation well. Further advancement of media and mass literacy has also changed the composition of our society. Now, people are becoming conscious and logical thinking and rational bent of mind. The role of media has also broadened. It has undertaken many ventures, along with entertainment, education and enhancement of social structure. Thus, the new media is a mirror of modern society expressing its needs, aspirations, expectations and failures.

II. Consumer Protection

2.1. Meaning and Concept

Every individual is a consumer, regardless of occupation, age, gender, community or religious affiliation. Consumer rights and welfare are now an integral part of the life of an individual and we all have made use of them at some or the other point in our daily routine.

Every year 15th March is observed as "World Consumer Rights Day". It commemorates a historic declaration (1962) by former US President John F. Kennedy of four basic consumer rights:

- The right to safety
- The right to be informed
- The right to choose
- The right to be heard

This declaration eventually led to the international recognition of the fact that all citizens, regardless of their incomes or social standing, have basic rights as consumers. Another significant day is 9 April 1985, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a set of guidelines for consumer protection and the Secretary General of the United Nations was authorized to persuade member countries to adopt these guidelines through policy changes or law. These guidelines constituted a comprehensive policy framework outlining what Governments need to do to promote consumer protection in the following areas:

- Physical safety
- Protection and promotion of consumer economic interests
- Standards for safety and quality of consumer goods and services
- Measures enabling consumers to obtain redressal
- Measures relating to specific areas (food, water, and pharmaceuticals) and
- Consumer education and information program

Now it is universally accepted that the consumer has a right to be provided with all relevant information in order to avoid exploitation and make a considered choice in availing of products and services from the market. These rights are well-defined, both on international and national platform and several agencies like the Government as well as voluntary organizations are constantly working towards safeguarding them.

In India, 24th December is celebrated as "National Consumer Rights Day", since the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was enacted on this day. The Consumer Protection Act was enacted in 1986 based on United Nations guidelines with the objective of providing better protection of consumers' interests. The Act provides for effective safeguards to consumers against various types of exploitations and unfair dealings, relying on mainly compensatory rather than a punitive or preventive approach. It applies to all goods and services unless specifically exempted and covers the private, public and cooperative sectors and provides for speedy and inexpensive adjudication.

The rights under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 flow from the rights enshrined in Articles 14 to 19 of the Constitution of India. The Right to Information Act (RTI), which has opened up governance processes of our country to the common public also, has far-reaching implications for consumer protection.

As per the Act, a '**Consumer**' has been defined as:

- Any person who buys goods for consideration, and any person who uses goods with the approval of the purchaser.
- Any person, who hires any service for a consideration and any beneficiary of such services, provided the service is availed with the approval of the person who had hired the service for a consideration.

Moreover, the consideration for either the goods or services may be either paid or promised, or partly paid or promised, or provided under a system of deferred payment.

The Act envisages the promotion and protection of the following rights of consumers:

2.2. Right to Safety

Means right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services, which are hazardous to life and property. The purchased goods and services availed of should not only meet their immediate needs, but also fulfill long term interests. Before purchasing, consumers should insist on the quality of the products as well as on the guarantee of the products and services. They should preferably purchase quality marked products such as ISI, AGMARK, etc.

2.3. Right to be Informed

Means right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods so as to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices. Consumer should insist on getting all the information about the product or service before making a choice or a decision. This will enable him to act wisely and responsibly and also enable him to desist from falling prey to high pressure selling techniques.

2.4. Right to Choose

Means right to be assured, wherever possible of access to variety of goods and services at competitive price. In case of monopolies, it means right to be assured of satisfactory quality and service at a fair price. It also includes right to basic goods and services. This is because unrestricted right of the minority to choose can mean a denial for the majority of its fair share. This right can be better exercised in a competitive market where a variety of goods are available at competitive prices.

2.5. Right to be heard

Means that consumer's interests will receive due consideration at appropriate forums. It also includes right to be represented in various forums formed to consider the consumer's welfare. The consumers should form non-political and non-commercial consumer organizations which can be given representation in various committees formed by the Government and other bodies in matters relating to consumers.

2.6. Right to Seek Redressal

Means right to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers. It also includes right to fair settlement of the genuine grievances of the consumer. Consumers must make complaint for their genuine grievances. Many a times their complaint may be of small value but its impact on the society as a whole may be very large. They can also take the help of consumer organizations in seeking redressal of their grievances.

2.7. Right to Consumer Education

Right to consumer education means the right to acquire the knowledge and skill to be an informed consumer throughout life. Ignorance of consumers, particularly of rural consumers, is mainly responsible for their exploitation. They should know their rights and must exercise them. Only then real consumer protection can be achieved with success. Thus, the concern of consumer protection is to ensure fair trade practices; quality of goods and efficient services with information to the consumer with regard to quality, quantity, potency, composition and price for their choice of purchase. Such a consumer protection policy creates an environment whereby the clients, customers, and consumers receive satisfaction from the delivery of goods and services needed by them.

III. Objectives Of The Study

- To evaluate the response of media towards consumers' cause
- To know, as to what kind of awakening is created by media towards social-evil of consumer exploitation.
- To understand how media has come forward to create awareness about consumer protection and all such legislations.

IV. Media And Consumers Problems

As a general rule, the problem of society, a social group or in some cases, the problems of individual are well expressed by no one else but media. Our civilization is characterized by impact of media on its structure, value system and outlook. Many socioeconomic problems, education of masses and social awakening can best be done by media. Media presently deals with problems of current importance. Where investigative journalism, reporting of pertinent and important facts and high lightening those events which otherwise cannot be noticed occupies prime position. Due to advent of T.V... a large section of society is now influenced by media activities to a great extent. It has become a silent opinion maker and hence it is working on a larger plane than any other institution. In the current past, media has undertaken the job of consumer education and fighting against exploitation of consumers.

V. Research Methodology

Research process includes research design, which tells about the nature of the study. Research comprises defining and redefining problems, and suggested solutions, collection, organizing and evaluating data, making deductions and reaching conclusion. This research is an exploratory research.

5.1. Sample Design and Sample Size

Random sample procedure was followed to select sample respondents. The total number of respondents was 150.

5.2. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from the above respondents by using questionnaire specifically designed for the purpose.

5.3. Data Collection

In total 150 questionnaires were distributed out of which 120 sample was finally selected.

5.4. Analysis of Data

The statements on consumer awareness were framed after critical review of literature and discussions with experts in the field. The answer to these statements were sought in terms of 'right', 'wrong', 'not sure' and 'don't know' which were scored as follows :

Right : 3 points

Not Sure : 2 points

Wrong : 0 points

Scoring pattern was reverse in case of wrong statements. Thus minimum score was [0] and maximum possible [105]. Mean and Standard deviation were calculated and range was formed to categorize the respondents as follows:

Low awareness : 0-35

Partial awareness : 36- 70

High awareness : 71-105

VI. Data Analysis

The research has made a survey as to, whether readers refer articles of consumer interest. The major observations in this connection are as follows:-

It was observed from table 1 that out of total 41.6 percent of respondent has low level of awareness regarding consumer terms.

Table 1: Distribution of sample according to their level of consumer awareness (N=120)

Respondents	Low		Partial		High	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
18-25	15	12.45	06	4.98	04	3.32
26-33	11	9.13	07	5.81	03	2.49
34-41	10	8.30	03	2.49	05	4.15
42-49	06	4.98	05	4.15	07	5.81
50-57	05	4.15	04	3.32	10	8.30
58-65	03	2.49	03	2.49	13	10.79
	50	41.6	28	23.3	42	35.0

VII. Result

- There is a significant difference between the awareness levels of the respondent of different age group regarding consumer protection law. Respondent above the age group of 50 were more aware about the popular consumer terminology than the respondent below the age group of 49.
- Television was the main media which influence their buying most.
- There is a significant difference between the awareness levels of the respondent of different age group about consumer organization working in and around their area. Respondent above the age group of 42 were more aware about the consumer organization working in their area than the respondent below the age group of 41.

VIII. Discussion

The research has made a survey as to, whether readers refer articles of consumer interest. The major observations in this connection are as follows:

- A majority of consumers read the articles regarding consumers' interest. However, the frequency of reading these articles on a regular basis is not very high
- The readership of these articles is limited and irregular which indicates that, there is a limited and lukewarm interest in the issues of consumer concern.
- The expectation of consumers in connection with consumers' column varies. However, most of the consumers prefer to read matters regarding consumers' interest and legal decisions and Government policies affecting consumers' interest. This indicates a purposeful and limited interest of readers in the consumers' movement.
- There is a general disinterest to read about issues related with consumer movement and activities of the local consumers' associations.
- Most of the consumers feel that these articles do help them to know about consumers, right and about consumer movement.

IX. Conclusions

Media in all its form, print or electronic, is a mirror of the times and society we live in. It connects us to the world and the world to us. Media is an integral part of our life. In today's world, where one's social circle is mostly just work-related, based on some or the other selfish motive, we tend to believe and depend more on the media for every type of information. Media thus has tremendous impact on the way a society conducts itself in the present, as well as the shape it would take in the future. It influences people of all age groups. Media also plays a very useful role in setting up good or amicable relations between traders and buyers. The promotion of fair trade practices, establishing code of conduct for businessmen are the tasks that media alone can shoulder. The concept of ethics in the economy relates to "morality, ethics, professional and organizational ethics. Each industry has its own guidelines for the ethical requirements. But on the four main requirements for marketing communications are legal, decent, honest and truthful. Unfortunately, in a society that is the way the company intended to profit from the use of marketing communication messages targets "can be a form of social pollution from potentially harmful and unintended effects of the consumer may have the decision represented". The words of Bernstein (1951), said fifty-six years ago are still very much a question of present interest: "It is not true that if we 'save advertising, we save all,' but it seems reasonable to assume that if we do not save advertising, we might lose all."

X. Future Scope

There is a wide scope for further research since this study was limited to the role of media in consumer education and protection, but the arrival of e-commerce, m-commerce, and Right to Information Act 2005 which was passed by Indian Parliament by June 15, 2005 and came fully into force on October 13, 2005. Future research can focus on the study of the Indian consumer who are now enabled to collect, share, compile and analyze the information in certain cases such as fairness, values and ethics within the buying and selling in India.

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